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Kaitlin Puckett

Abilene Christian University, kaitlin.puckett@acu.edu

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Texas Children's Hospital: Design as Therapy

Kaitlin Puckett

Abilene Christian University
Department of Communication

Introduction

Texas Children's Hospital (TCH) is a world-renowned children's hospital facility "located in Houston, Texas, [and] is a not-for-profit organization committed to creating a community of healthy children through excellence in patient care, education and research. [They] are proud to be consistently ranked among the top children's hospitals in the nation."¹ Texas Children's Hospital commits to daily caring for their patients with a quality that is unlike any other hospital. While this dedication to quality health care is essential, the hospital makes other efforts to maximize quality and experience that should not be overlooked.

Texas Children's Hospital works tirelessly to ensure that the quality of health care provided to patients and their families is matched and encouraged by an environment that is conducive to healing, in addition to creating positive experiences for their child patients. Texas Children's Hospital worked with FKP Architects to create an environment of bright colors, large geometric shapes, family friendly play rooms and examining rooms, and a variety of other design aspects that encourage a positive environment. The design used in this hospital is unlike the simple, white walled, and clean cut designs of many other hospitals and the differences seem to have significant impacts on the children and families visiting the hospital. This design is important for the health and healing of the patients by encouraging positive attitudes and feelings

1. Texas Children's Hospital, *Learn About Texas Children's Hospital*, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.texaschildrens.org/About-Us/>.

about their visit or stay in the hospital. FKP Architects and TCH are leaders in pediatric design and have found great success in their warm and inviting design approach. While the impact of this design on children and their families is most important, it is also essential to understand rhetorical situation, as this paper focuses on the impacts of the rhetorical situation created by the design of the hospital on patient experiences. The analysis of the rhetorical situation created by the design of TCH includes the history of both FKP Architects and TCH, as well as understanding the context, audience, and exigence of the text itself.

Rhetorical Situation

Rhetor

FKP Architects began in 1937 and has continued to thrive in the hospital design industry for the past 75 years. Over this extensive time period the company “has been an innovator in . . . clients’ health care and life science projects.”² The company architects have used their talents and gifts to become leaders in their industry and “rethink logistics of hospital designs, streamline work processes within hospitals, improve economics, raise quality of care, transform business, and ultimately change lives.”³ They have “committed to continued innovation in health care business, design, and operations.”⁴

While FKP Architects’ portfolio includes a wide range of hospitals, children’s hospitals are one of the group’s main focuses. Their purpose of putting so much of their time and resources into the design of hospitals, particularly children’s hospitals, is rooted in the notion that “it is every parent’s nightmare [when] your child is critically ill. You rush to a hospital, where

2. *Flying High into the Next 75 Years*, YouTube video, (0:53), posted by FKP Architects, February 8, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35F088g1fss>.

3. FKP Architects, “Flying High into the Next 75 Years”.

4. FKP Architects, “Flying High into the Next 75 Years”.

you're confronted by lights, noises, [and] activity. Within this cold clinical space, there is no quiet place to sit, to pray, to breathe. Meanwhile, a child struggles to heal.”⁵ Strategic essentialism, or the process of making an identity ingredient the core part of one's persona that legitimizes the right to speak, is used by the company in the way that they highlight their role in reforming children's hospitals.⁶ This strategy, in addition to FKP's acknowledgement of 75 years of service in this role, legitimizes the group to speak on the design and construction of children's hospitals.

FKP sets themselves apart from other companies because they value the experience a patient or customer has within a built space, from both a business and comfort perspective. Using “an inviting patient journey, enjoyable staff experience or stimulating learning environment, [they] design for the health and well-being of the user [as well as] the strength and vitality of business.”⁷

Context

The specific context I will be focusing on in this paper is the use of rhetoric and rhetorical tools by FKP Architects in the interior design and construction of children's hospitals, specifically focusing on Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, TX. Before recent remodels children's hospitals looked like almost every other hospital. They were cold, dreary, white, and felt stuffy and sterile. However, hospitals began to take notice of the importance of a more therapeutic and comfortable design in children's wings. Companies like FKP Architects took hold of this idea and began to remodel and overhaul already existing facilities.

5. *Children's Hospital of Orange County – FKP Case Study*, YouTube video, (2:39), posted by FKP Architects, March 4, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jm4TiStUKQ>.

6. Catherine Palczewski, Richard Ice, and John Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life* (State College, Pennsylvania, Strata Publishing), 162.

7. “Interiors,” FKP Architects, accessed September 30, 2013, <http://www.fkp.com/services/interiors>.

In 1995, Texas Children's began evaluating its ambulatory utilization and efficiency and found that while individual clinics desired more space, overall exam room utilization was only 41%. As part of a 1.2 million . . . campus expansion, TCH undertook an effort to completely transform their outpatient care setting.⁸

Through FKP's work with Texas Children's they "sought to create a spec that was family-friendly, flexible and efficient."⁹ The already existing structure of Texas Children's Clinical Care Center, before the 1995 remodel began, consisted of a 16-story building that resembled more of the standard hospitals in Western cultures. However, FKP Architects transformed it into a

16-story clinical tower [that] houses an outpatient lab, pharmacy, imaging and ambulatory surgery suites, plus ten floors of clinic and office space. In collaboration with Inventure Design, the building's interior features 3D shapes that act as iconic gateways to subspecialty clinics. Working with user groups to refine processes and staff roles, FKP created a unique floor plan that created more clinic space and increased patient throughput efficiency.¹⁰

Through this remodel TCH and FKP Architects aimed to create a design that was child friendly and promoted a comfortable and colorful environment for children and their families. FKP Architects expertise in design is matched by Texas Children's expertise in treating children. Together they create a dynamic and powerful duo in holistic medicine approaches for children.

Audience

The intended audience of the hospital is the children who will be in and out of the clinical care center. However, audience "can mean any person who hears, reads, or sees a symbolic action; the group targeted by a message, even if it is not present; or the group capable of acting in

8. "Texas Children's Hospital Clinical Care Center: Transformational Story," FKP Architects, Accessed September 30, 2013, http://www.fkp.com/portfolio/by_project_type/pediatric_centers/texas_childrens_hospital_clinical_care_center/transformational_story.

9. FKP Architects, "Texas Children's Hospital Clinical Care Center: Transformational Story".

10. Texas Children's Hospital Clinical Care Center", FKP Architects, accessed September 30, 2013, http://www.fkp.com/portfolio/by_project_type/pediatric_centers/texas_childrens_hospital_clinical_care_center.

response to the message”.¹¹ Therefore, it is important to note the unintended audiences as well. Children are at the center of the rhetor's message and are considered the “implied audience for whom a rhetor constructs symbolic action.”¹² Being that children are almost always going to be accompanied by a parent or guardian, those people would be considered the eavesdropping audience. While the parents or guardians are not necessarily the people who FKP Architects designed the hospital to benefit and make more comfortable, such persons constitute an audience who needs to hear the message along with the child.

In order to directly connect with the audience, the company had to first identify with children. They had to understand what children coming to the hospital needed and wanted. Once this was accomplished they had to understand the values and beliefs of the audience. If focusing on the intended audience, FKP would find that the children valued a comfortable atmosphere, fun interaction opportunities, and colorful familiarity. However, if focusing on the eavesdropping audience, or fourth persona, FKP would find that the parents or guardians also valued a comfortable atmosphere, but also valued safety and quality health care opportunities. As a result of having a mixed audience, FKP architects had to adapt their design and architectural remodel of TCH, as well as other hospitals, to their audiences. Meeting the wants and needs of the children was just as important as meeting the needs of the parents or guardians.

Exigence

Exigence is “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. The exigence calls for, or demands, a rhetorical response.”¹³ Within the context of a children's hospital the exigence is very much

11. Palczewski, Ice, and Fitch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 179.

12. Palczewski, Ice, and Fitch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 189.

13. Palczewski, Ice, and Fitch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 203.

evident. If a child is sick and in the hospital or at a clinical care center, there is an immediate obstacle to making them feel at ease and comfortable. For example, “a hospital stay can be a stressful experience for a child. Children miss home and normal everyday life. They may experience fear, confusion, and unfamiliarity with events. Children deserve to understand what is happening to them.”¹⁴ Creating a comfortable environment that is designed to make the children feel at home and in a more fun and easy-going environment is a fitting response to this issue.

If there appears to be a lack of care for the child's comfort and positive feelings, the child is more likely to not recover as quickly, have a negative outlook on his or her stay, treatment, and outcome, and to be less willing to cooperate with doctors and nurses. For example, “their feeling of wellbeing in hospital is dependent on their capacity to remain engaged, maintain a positive frame of mind and to feel comfortable in the hospital setting.”¹⁵ This creates an exigence in which swift action must be taken and the needs, attitudes, and care of the child must be taken into careful consideration in any way possible. FKP Architects does just this in the group's design of children's hospitals in the United States as well as in their remodel of TCH.

Methodology

Over the course of this paper, I aim to discover how rhetors, such as FKP Architects, use design as a form of therapy. In the context of the text, my goal is to find out how FKP Architects uses the design of TCH as a form of therapy and how this impacts the perceptions, attitudes, and resiliency of the patients and their families.

14. “Child Life Program,” *University of Maryland Medical Center Children's Hospital*, modified August 30, 2013, accessed September 30, 2013, <http://um.edu/programs/childrens/services/inpatient/child-life>.

15. Katie Bishop, “Through Children's Eyes: Understanding How to Create Supportive Healthcare Environments for Children,” *World Health Design*, accessed September 30, 2013, <http://www.worldhealthdesign.com/Through-Childrens-Eyes.aspx>.

I chose TCH because of the impact I have seen it have on children and their families through my own personal experience. I have spent much of the last ten years in and out of TCH, and I have seen the design make a personal difference in the lives of those around me. Texas Children's Hospital is also a good example to use for this discussion because of the hospital's recent facility upgrades that are specifically related to design. The hospital and its staff are also nationally ranked, considered one of the top children's hospitals in the country, and serve a large number of patients and families from around the world. This gives TCH an important advantage when it comes to treating children and makes its staff experts in the area of pediatric care.

It is important to address this topic and answer this question because of the direct impact that it has on the healing and treatment of children in the hospital. Two sections, one discussing the use of argumentation through visuals and the other discussing narratives, will explore these rhetorical tools to discover how rhetors use design as a form of therapy. In the section of argumentation through visuals, I will discuss the use of color, artwork, and scenes in creating an argument for the claims made by FKP Architects and TCH, as well as the messages intended for the audience through these tools. The next section will explore narratives using social truth, comic frame, and fantasy theme. In this section I will discuss how these tools are used to create a narrative for the hospital and how this may be perceived by the audience of child patients and their families. These rhetorical tools are essential to creating an argument for the use of design as a form of therapy and treatment in TCH. One of the most significant ways the rhetor does this is through the use of visuals.

Analyzing Argumentation and Visuals

Color

Texas Children's Hospital utilizes color in the design of each floor of its building to convey a message to the children and parents who filter through every day. The hospital's self-proclaimed goal is to "create a consistent, unified campus that is both elegant and playful through the use of colorful, childlike interior elements that are timeless, ageless, and durable. This simple design goal was the core building block for the design and planning for this renovation project."¹⁶ This serves as a response to studies that claim

for 50% of patients, these spaces are associated with boredom or anxiety, or both, even for patients who are waiting for routine health examinations. Child patients can find exposure to unfamiliar people, separation anxiety, restricted movement, and anticipation of painful or uncomfortable procedures, such as immunizations, particularly stressful.¹⁷

As a person walks onto any given floor of the building, she will find that colors are bright, bold, and everywhere. Common colors that can be found are red, purple, yellow, blue, and green.

For example, imagine yourself walking onto the Cancer/Oncology floor of the clinical care center. Upon exiting the elevator, you will round a corner to find an expansive waiting room connected to an infusion room where patients receive their treatments. Both of these rooms consist of walls covered in vibrant reds and cool blues, with furniture matching the bright interiors. Bright orange paints the walls behind the sign-in desk, and hues of purple and teal line the cushions of the furniture. The use of these colors is intended to create a comfortable

16. Architects, FKP, "Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, TX." *Health Care Design Magazine*, modified August 31, 2005, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.healthcaredesignmagazine.com/article/texas-childrens-hospital-houston-tx>.

17. Elaine Biddiss, Amy McPherson, Geoffrey Shea, and Patricia McKeever, "The Design and Testing of Interactive Hospital Spaces to Meet the Needs of Waiting Children," *Health Environments Research & Design Journal (HERD)* 6, no. 3 (2013): 50.

atmosphere for patients and their families. While the bright reds and oranges create a fun environment for the children, the “cool colors tend to be more calming, so things that are in the blues and the blue-greens, those types of colors really put people at ease because they do bring a sense of tranquility.”¹⁸ Other studies claim that “a trend in emotional associations with color is also found; brighter colors are associated with positive feelings such as being happy, cheerful, or hopeful.”¹⁹ Texas Children's Hospital even uses bright red in its logo, which is the very first thing patients see when they enter each floor. These uses of color are found in a vast majority of the hospital; color splashes the walls of examining rooms, waiting rooms, hallways, and much more.

Artwork

Another significant way that TCH uses visual rhetoric to convey messages to the audience is by the use of artwork throughout the building. One of the iconic ways TCH uses visual artwork is in the life-sized metal cows placed at every elevator stop and every entrance to the building. These stand as reminders of the childlike interiors and the welcoming nature of the hospital. Designed in themes ranging from Winnie the Pooh to *Starry Night*, these cows serve as visual representations of the goals set by FKP Architects and TCH.

Two of the most well-known cows that greet visitors when they first enter the building (after parking their cars at the clinical care) are among some of the most impressive displays of artwork in the entire sixteen-story building. Designed by artist Linda Dolack of Illinois, the

18. Jennifer Kovacs Silvis, “Healing Hues: Choosing Paint Colors for Healthcare,” *Health Care Design Magazine*, modified May 11, 2012, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.healthcaredesignmagazine.com/article/healing-hues-choosing-paint-colors-healthcare>.

19. Jin Gyu “Phillip” Park and Changbae Park, “Color Perception in Pediatric Patient Room Design: American Versus Korean Pediatric Patients,” *Health Environments Research & Design Journal (HERD)* 6, no. 4 (2013): 13.

Rhinestone Cow display consists of two twelve-foot-tall and five-foot-wide statues of personified cows. These two cows are comprised of fiberglass and acrylic and stand erect in the TCH lobby. Both cows are dressed as colorful ballerinas with multi-colored flowered tutus and tops on. Most impressively, each cow is covered with 170,000 Swarovski rhinestones.²⁰

These two ballerina rhinestone cows have become the focal point of the cow art phenomenon that overtook TCH.

Another important facet of the use of artwork in TCH is the abundant integration of wall art created by past and present patients. A visitor can find all sorts of patient created artwork lining the walls of each floor of the hospital. By using patient-made artwork, the hospital again reminds those in the building of the intended comfortable nature of the hospital and the sense of familiarity and calmness that the hospital wants to create for the children. These visual representations stand as examples of how the hospital uses intentional design to change the outlook of a patient's visit. In a Colorado hospital,

art was [used] to serve as an integral part of the design of the new hospital. The art program's primary function was to facilitate way finding and education while providing positive distractions. The "ageless" works of art throughout the newly built hospital included colored glass panels with Colorado imagery such as snowflakes, skaters, and trout; terrazzo flooring incorporating butterflies, birds, and other familiar images; a maze traversing the entire atrium; and photographic images of rustic Indian paintbrush, marsh marigolds, and colorful aspen leaves applied to flooring tiles and etched onto glass panels and walls.²¹

These artwork opportunities get the patients involved and allow them to see that their hospital visit has the potential to be positive and that they are active participants in the healing

20. Linda Dolack, "*Frida Stare and Ginger Rhinestone*," Linda Dolack mixed media artist, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.lindadolack.com/dancingcows.html>.

21. Ann Marie Kotzer, Susan Koch Zacharakis, Mary Reynolds, and Fred Buening, "Evaluation of the Built Environment: Staff and Family Satisfaction Pre- and Post-Occupancy of the Children's Hospital," *Health Environments Research & Design Journal (HERD)* 4, no. 4 (2011): 66.

community of the facility. The use of this artwork also gives the patients a sense of ownership over the hospital and the experience that they will have there. A hospital can often seem like it is completely run by people who are disconnected from the patients; it can seem distant and impersonal at times. However, by using artwork made by the patients themselves, TCH gives them a small piece of ownership. This also impacts other patients who may come through TCH by giving them the idea that there are people their age involved in parts of the hospital, rather than just adults and disconnected people.

Scenes

Another, less public use of visuals in TCH is in the scenes surrounding the medical equipment the hospital uses for various tests with the patients. One example of the use of scenes throughout the hospital can be found in the MRI and Cat-Scan machines. One of the most elaborate scenes is in a room that holds an MRI machine decorated like the sea. As a visitor walks into the room, he encounters blue rippling lights that shine on the machine to create the feeling of the water. The machine itself is decorated in vibrant and playful sea creatures that lead a child through his or her journey in the MRI machine. Scenes are also found in the patient and play areas designated for the child patients and their families. Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego claims that

getting an MRI can be a stressful experience that often requires young patients to be sedated. Studies have shown that entertainment during an MRI exam can soothe anxiety and minimize claustrophobia, leading to faster and better exams. . . . To make the process even more kid-friendly, the entire MRI suite – including the MRI itself – is decorated in a cartoon sea creature theme.²²

22. Rady Children's Hospital, "Magnetic Resonance Imaging," *Rady Children's Hospital San Diego*, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.rchsd.org/programsservices/a-z/p-r/radiology/mri/>.

The use of these scenes creates an escape from the reality that the child is about to enter into. For many children, big machines, like the MRI machine, can be intimidating and scary. However, by creating a scene around the machine, the focus is taken off the machine itself and projected onto the details of the scene. Rather than being scared by the MRI, the child has the potential to instead be intrigued by the sea design. These scenes also increase the comfort levels of the room for the children and parents, and allow them to relax to a greater degree than they might in an undecorated room.

Analyzing Narrative

Another way that FKP Architects uses rhetoric through design as a form of therapy is through the use of narratives. Social truths, comic themes, and fantasy themes all play a part in the construction of a new reality for the patients and families at the hospital. This is an important part of the use of design in TCH and provides further support for the claim that therapy and treatment should involve more than just medicine.

Illness, and specifically illness in children, is a metanarrative that TCH addresses in its design and care. The basis for this appeal comes in the belief that a child's illness and the treatment of that illness is about more than the disease itself. Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch state that

in her book, *Narrative Medicine*, [Rita Charon] proposes that health care providers practice medicine using the "narrative skills of recognizing, absorbing, interpreting, and being moved by the stories of illness". As Charon explains, narratives have great power to create understanding and knowledge, even in the most scientifically dominated fields.²³

In line with this idea, TCH has used design to take a different approach to illness treatment.

Social Truth

23. Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 128.

A large portion of the narrative constructed by TCH is based on a social truth, or “a belief and value that does not refer to some objective reality, but to social reality—those beliefs about what is right that people have arrived at together.”²⁴ The social truth at the basis of the design of TCH is the belief that a child should feel comfortable and safe while he or she is at a hospital. Another social truth is that the well-being of a patient is not limited to his or her treatment alone but is also influenced by other factors, such as environmental factors. Texas Children's Hospital's blog states that

we understand that any type of procedure can be scary for a child of any age. Our goal is to increase [the] child's understanding of the procedure while hopefully helping [the] child feel less anxious. We want [the] child to feel as comfortable as possible so that he or she can have a positive, successful experience, and maybe even have a little fun. We know children love to play and we do too!²⁵

This claim and belief encourages and supports the efforts made by TCH and FKP Architects in the innovative design techniques implemented in the hospital facilities. Texas Children's further enforces this social truth by providing toys for the children in each waiting room as well as a variety of activities for children of all ages. Toys, computers, video games, books, and crafts are examples of these things that fill each of these rooms and provide an example of the social truth that children should be at ease and have fun, even if they are at the hospital.

Comic Frame

The design of the hospital is driven by the social truth mentioned above, but is also influenced by the frame of mind held by the patients, medical professionals, and designers

24. Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 133.

25. Katie Weisemann. *National Radiologic Technology Week: The Role of Child Life Specialists in Pediatric Radiology*, Texas Children's Blog, modified on November 8, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.texaschildrensblog.org/2013/11/national-radiologic-technology-week-the-role-of-child-life-specialists-in-pediatric-radiology/>.

connected with TCH. However, the design does not reflect the common view of disease and illness, but rather works to change that view and provide an opposite, and thereby positive, perspective.

Typically, individuals view disease and illnesses such as those the children at TCH are dealing with through a tragic framework and viewpoint. This means that patients have “a viewpoint that would have [them] see others [or things] as vicious and evil rather than as mistaken. Because evil implies that a person [or thing] has an inherent defect, correction is not possible as a solution.”²⁶ This frame of mind would portray a disease as being something that is evil. It would assume that there is little to no hope, and that the situation is tragic. Illness in children, especially serious illness, is oftentimes viewed through this frame of mind. However, TCH and FKP Architects took this frame of mind and turned it into a comic frame of mind.

A comic frame of mind is the opposite of a tragic frame in that it “would have you see others as mistaken rather than as evil.”²⁷ This is what the design of Texas Children's attempts to accomplish in the children as well as their families. The use of color, art, geometric shapes, and a comforting atmosphere is how the facility and its design is utilized in order to turn the tendency to view a visit to the hospital through a tragic frame, to a comic frame. This change in frame of mind allows hospitals to achieve their goal of creating a positive experience for the children and their families. This comic frame also serves as an important aspect of the narrative being portrayed by the TCH and FKP Architects and reveals the social truth and its influence on those individuals most important to the narrative.

26. Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 138.

27. Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 138.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the design of Texas Children's Hospital is an effective way to create more positive hospital experiences and improve the overall satisfaction of a patient's visit to the hospital. More importantly, the use of design by FKP Architects is a unique approach to therapy because it pertains to the child patients coming through the hospital.

As a rhetor, FKP Architects uses the design in TCH as an additional way to treat the patients by providing an interactive and uniquely designed atmosphere. FKP Architects effectively uses color, artwork, and scenes to create a visually intriguing and calming environment that provides patients with the ability to escape into a different world. This escape creates a hospital experience that is unlike any other. For example, the MRI machines decorated with sea themes allow patients to be distracted from the reality of the reasons that they are in the hospital. In similar ways, FKP Architects uses social truth and comic frames to construct a reality that is different from what would usually be found in a hospital.

FKP Architects has broken the mold for hospital design and continues to create hospital designs that engage the patients and provide an environment conducive for healing. This use of design as a form of therapy requires patients, family members, and even the general public to reevaluate their preconceived notions about the role of a hospital in the healing process. It asks the audience to consider the design of the hospital as taking an important role in that process and the treatment of the patients. As a result, the hospital uses design as a form of therapy by creating a vibrant, scenic, and child-friendly atmosphere that significantly differs from the normal hospital experience and radically transforms previous social truths through comic frames and fantasy themes.

This is an important use of design because of how it impacts the children and their families. The patients are allowed to be themselves and feel more at ease than they would be at other hospitals. In effect, kids are encouraged to be kids and not focus on the reasons they are in the hospital, which is an important aspect of a holistic approach to therapy. In understanding this concept, a personal approach is unavoidable: Think about your children or children who you are close to. More than likely, you would prefer they go to a hospital where they felt comfortable and that fostered a friendly healing environment over a white-walled stiff hospital setting. The former mindset is exactly what FKP Architects and TCH have accomplished by creating meaningful spaces that change the lives of hundreds of thousands of children each year.